



TN0605-1: A Foundation for Community Planning

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George Rebane, Ph.D.
SESF, Director of Research

Sierra Environmental Studies Foundation
Nevada City, California 95959
sesfoundation.org

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Abstract

Generating plans to deal with a community's development, traffic, air quality, workforce housing, growth, safety, health, and other issues continues to be an exercise that ranges between comedy and farce. In this technical note we seek to introduce the notions of systems science to planning for smaller communities. The established principles and 'rules' presented here have long served in institutional planning employed by corporations, leading non-profits, and, more recently, even some departments of government.

This is not a cookbook but a structured smorgasbord of prescriptions, homilies, and 'laws' from systems science that suggest a new way of doing planning in a participative community. A participative community is one in which there is always significant public exposure of the planning process sometimes accompanied by an emerging consensus that actually informs the exercise. We claim here a realistic, some may say cynical, view of such participation based on the manner in which public input is usually solicited and the public's demonstrated level of critical thinking acumen in early 21st century America. Nevertheless, the hallmark of our democracy is that the people must and will be heard.

For completeness, we preamble a short tutorial of systems concepts with a compendium of tenets that underlie the idea of the surprisingly hazy notion of 'community'. Careful readers will draw their own conclusions about whether/how these tenets will affect the likelihood of satisfying the popular sop of 'we need a plan that will be fair to all'. The report concludes with two checklists – items to improve the likelihood that the process and the plan will evade the comedy-farce spectrum, and a compendium of actual planning procedures that will infuriate some and may bring a smile to others who have seen it all.

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George Rebane, Ph.D.
SESF, Director of Research
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1. Overview

Today towns and cities are supposed to grow and evolve under some level of government control to assure the people who live there that certain quality of life (QoL) and other issues are properly handled. Furthermore, the resulting controls are supposed to be informed by and reflect the duly adopted plans put out periodically by both governmental and non-governmental (citizen groups, institutions, ...) organizations. These plans and their regulatory progeny (ordnances, etc.) are intrinsically political documents intended to serve the interests of various organized and unorganized constituencies. They are all publicly marketed and variously enforced under the rubric of providing for the common good. Unfortunately common good does not have a commonly accepted definition.

In this paper we outline a collection of tenets¹ or beliefs, principles, processes, and definitions about community planning in the early 21st century. Most of these are held by a large body of students of community planning that includes Sierra Environmental Studies Foundation (SESF). However, many of these are still rejected by people inhabiting either ends of our political spectrum. The approach here is to counsel the adoption of long-practiced realities and a community-centered perspective that acknowledges a selfish starting point. In sum, we believe that social engineering for bettering the world at large obtains from the many communities each achieving satisfaction with their own progress.

The purpose here is to foster open and clear communications among people of good will who join their energies to influence how their communities should work. With such an open, understandable, and accessible set of common knowledge it is possible communicate and build toward an acknowledged goal. New information and proposals can then be developed and evaluated on an established set of commonly accepted merits expressed in the goal statement that reflects the maximum possible consensus.

We begin in §2 by reviewing and defining certain basic principles and widely understood tenets of how most people believe society works. Since a community is indeed an inter-related system, in this we adopt the perspectives of systems science as the modern body of knowledge for understanding how to characterize a community and plan for its benefit. In §3 we present an overview of systems and systems thinking to give the reader a high-level understanding of the most powerful paradigm known by our species for solving complex problems. With these notions firmly in hand, we conclude this short report with §4 that lists and defines the steps for a reasonable planning process and contrasts them

¹ An opinion, doctrine, or principle held as being true by a person or especially by an organization. (dictionary.com)

with the commonly implemented and often unreasonable process – in short, we conclude with prescriptions from system science and institutional experience, and some, perhaps, tongue-in-cheek proscriptions. We begin.

2. The Concept of Community in Community Planning

In our times ‘community’ has become hackneyed and overused, a word whose meaning to people is hazy, varied, and, most likely, lost. In the dictionary² the definition of community revolves around two themes – “A group of people living in the same locality and under the same government.” and “A group of people having common interests: *the scientific community; the international business community.*” Counties in today’s America presumably embrace both of these themes when they talk about their community.

When we think about planning for a community we naturally think about coming up with a prescription for the common good that will be implemented by a free people within the context of a commonly held social contract. There are, of course, alternative ways to make, communicate, and implement plans. Here we could be talking about a fiat plan delivered to the county’s residents by an outside agency of the state or federal government and enforced by some armed constabulary. Alternatively, the plan, as a finished product, could be devised within the county’s own governing bureaucracy and summarily announced to the people along with its implementation and enforcement ordinances. Implementing such diktats is not the subject of this report.

The community plans and planning we consider here are about prescriptions for common actions which emerge from a planning process that involves the same community in which the plan will be implemented through, hopefully, minimally coercive means. It is clear that the success of such an enterprise hinges primarily on the expressed common interests which the people have that form them into a community. In the remainder of this section we discuss a minimum set of principles and tenets that inform and enable a community to plan together for their common good. To the extent that these are shared, such planning is facilitated and vice versa.

2.1. The Basis of Community - Trust Your Neighbor

As a free people we only live and work in the vicinity of people whose public behavior we generally approve of and can reliably predict. If a person cannot successfully predict another’s behavior, that person will either distance herself³ or will attempt to restrict the other’s behavior to the degree necessary for life to go on. Stress, mental illness, and/or eventual violence are the usual alternatives.

2.1.1. Corollary1 – Homogeneous Communities

In more homogeneous communities a common culture (traditions, customs, taboos, ...) has served to make social behavior predictable so that one doesn’t have to spend too

² Dictionary.com

³ Her equals him and all that.

much time looking over one's shoulder to maintain security. Such trust allows people to specialize in their contributions and the community gets a lot of different things done to needed improve their QoL – you don't have to waste time guarding your stuff all the time while trying to make bricks. In such communities policing and enforcement of the code of conduct is mostly informal and distributed thereby taking little out of the common coffee.

2.1.2. Corollary2 – Inhomogeneous Communities

For peace and productivity, a diverse and/or intensely multi-cultural community needs to establish its common code through a set of formal statutes. Since there is an attempt to define and proscribe all conflicting behaviors, the surviving list of things not proscribed (i.e. freedoms) is necessarily reduced either directly or collaterally. Today we all enjoy such a social environment. In such situations policing and enforcement must also be formalized (and made culture independent) at a considerable cost to the community.

2.2. 'You Can't Just Do One Thing'

A human community is an extremely complex system that may be viewed from any number of perspectives. Such a complex system has inputs/influences that come from the outside (exogenous) and others that arise internally (endogenous). The latter usually result from either reinforcing or balancing feedback loops of causes within the system itself – i.e. things are tightly coupled and changing one thing affects several others. All remedies and prescriptions must always be considered within their known inter-relations that impact other factors – no exceptions.

2.3. System Science Works in Community Planning

Complex dynamic systems theory established itself in the 1960s as the grounding technical discipline for designing and building everything from heating thermostats to entire space stations and everything in between. In the late 70s businesses graduated from 'operations research' and started using systems theory with advanced mathematics to analyze and plan business operations (this was broadly labeled 'analytics'). In the 80s various governmental bodies and institutions commissioned to solve social and community planning problems began to adopt the methods and analytics of systems science. The application of these disciplines matured in the 90s [1]⁴ and are now practiced in all fields. All leading schools of business, public policy, and social science proudly publicize their adoption and practice of these protocols.

2.4. Not Everyone Wants to Use Systems Thinking in Planning

People and groups with fixed and/or pre-existing agendas tend to reject the objective application of systems theory. They instinctively know that such process, applied rigorously, will be out of their control and the outcome of such analyses may (or will) weaken their previously established position or bias. However, just because a community is small does not mean it is immune to the pitfalls of ignoring such analytics. Ignorance is an equal opportunity employer.

⁴ Square brackets denote references.

2.5. Systems Thinking Requires Training

While the general principles of systems theory are readily accessible to non-technical audiences, the ability to appreciate and apply systems protocols to model specific community processes requires some preparation. Such preparation is possible through concurrent training of motivated individuals and groups that can be undertaken concurrently during an ongoing planning cycle.

2.6. Selectively Exclusionary Processes are the only Means to Increase QoL for a Community

Historically it was the naturally selective processes that originally created the quality environment which drew the early and current inhabitants to desirable living spaces. People with similar belief systems gathered together to build communities which reflected their commonly held beliefs. When people with widely varying beliefs later move into such communities to partake of the 'good life' they witnessed as visitors, it is often the case that the original community is destroyed in the process of attempting to accommodate the newcomers. In the United States such changes have usually occurred significantly before over-population or crowding have become the dominant social determinant. Under today's laws the factors affecting the cost of living in a community seem to be the only exclusionary tools that remain to slow change and maintain the QoL for the established residents. And this last bastion is under active assault from state and federal legislatures seeking to enforce equal-outcome social policy.

2.7. Communities are Confused in Adopting Planning Goals

When adopting planning goals people often ask, "Do we want to become a half-way house for the downtrodden and under-privileged who don't currently live here? Or do we want to become a desirable destination community that provides a high-quality AND stable QoL to our residents?" Answering yes to both questions doesn't work - there is no free lunch. Without assessing value to the outcome, attempting to equally satisfy both objectives always results in becoming the half-way house as we have seen happen to countless communities across the land in the path of 'progress'.

2.8. Growing Half-way House Communities is Very Profitable

Both business people and government employees benefit from the promotion, construction, administration, policing, maintenance, and rehabilitation of half-way house communities as they progress from low density middle class towns through suburban sprawl to hopeless high density urban jungles. The investors, builders, and commercial service providers don't have to live there. The administrators of such communities have a growing list of steady jobs from the state. And the perpetual activists have a more visible reason for existence, while the politicians welcome dense, malleable, under-educated constituencies which can be gerrymandered into beneficial sinecures. Expanding such land tracts is a powerful self-perpetuating process supported by natural fertility and external sources of cash to meet the eternal shortfalls of the 'communities' that embark on such fateful journeys.

2.9. Half-way House Communities Lose their Middle Class Sponsors

As a resident of such an evolving community, if you pay taxes and can afford to move away, sooner than later you will do so. Such emigrants reason that since you can't get out of paying for it, at least you don't have to suffer in the middle of it and risk losing property value or worse.

2.10. Financing Today's Communities

2.10.1. A Community's Cashflow is NOT a Zero Sum Game

A cleverly administered community no longer has to worry about the principle of 'robbing Peter to pay Paul', since both can come out ahead quite nicely, thank you. This is made possible by everyone first sending their cash to the county seat, or state capitol, or Washington DC, and then sitting down at the great poker table of state largesse. If you play your cards right you can get back more than you sent in, and you'd better at least play them with some degree of finesse else you get back a lot less than you paid in. And if you don't want to play at all, your inexorable fate is determined by the theory of the commons [2] – you lose.

2.10.2. The price of getting state monies is giving up local freedoms – every dollar comes with an attached dictum or 'User's Manual' prescribing how it must be spent.

2.10.3. A Community is either a Cash Exporter or Cash Importer

Cash exporting communities have businesses that produce stuff, provide needed services, and hire people who get paid to work and then pay taxes. Cash importing communities are more difficult to identify because they also have some businesses and workers, but a lot of their workers are state employees and many residents don't have to or can't work. It's hard to distinguish a community's cashflow status by simple observation; to keep their wheels turning some mighty fine looking towns suck up cash from miles around.

2.11. Building any growth supporting infrastructure in high QoL regions, in the longer term, will degrade QoL (Consumption of a commons will always expand to exceed its capacity, and facilitating such consumption speeds its destruction.)

2.11.1. Corollary1 - Increasing Road Traffic Capacity Degrades Long-term QoL in a Growth-prone Community (Braess' Law)

Numerous studies have now demonstrated this [1]. All California adults have witnessed it in their own lifetimes, but very few have connected the dots.

2.12. Every Line of Civil Code and Enforced Regulation serves to Limit the Freedoms of Individuals within the Jurisdiction of Such Statutes

Freedom is good, but this does not mean that all statutes are bad. Because many of our actions affect others and because we must be able to predict and expect salutary behavior

from others, we need commonly accepted rules that come at the cost of individual liberties. The goal should be to always work for the minimum number of such strictures.

2.13. Seminal Question #1 – The Rights of Non-residents

To what extent should a non-resident with ONLY a financial interest in the targeted community (say, Town A) have in determining the future direction and QoL of that community?

2.13.1. Corollary1 – To what extent should a non-resident with no financial interest in Town A be able to influence its future direction?

2.13.2. Corollary2 – Who is the final arbiter of Town A’s QoL and how must such arbiter be affected by (accountable for) the decisions ultimately taken?

2.14. Seminal Question #2 – Diversity and QoL

To what extent does diversity promote a community’s QoL? In any community there is only a finite amount of available space and a finite amount of time in, say, a year. The more we want the community to reflect the image of ourselves, as opposed to the image of others, the less chance there will be of that happening as more diverse people are successful in demanding equal time and space in satisfying their own special desires. If all people in a very diverse population require certain days to be set aside for visible celebrations/observances of their own particular traditions, then the community will come to suffer an ongoing under-attended sequence of public events which on the whole serve to restrict its productive activities and dilute the specialty that each of the diverse groups can contribute.

2.14.1. Corollary1 – Within the law of the land (not the dictates of private advocacy groups), how does a community raise the diversity/QoL issue in the public mind so that its informative goal (i.e. generating light vs. heat) is not co-opted by non-resident special interest groups who view the community as another target for their social agenda?

2.14.2. Corollary2 – The only peaceful solutions to such an excess of diversity demands is to find and enforce (with the force state arms) a middle ground that pleases no one in the current generation, and hope that the next generation will evolve into an amalgam that cares less for the values and mores of their original cultures.

2.14.3. Corollary3 – Subrogation of distinct cultures through state dictums is not always successful as witnessed by the opportunistic balkanization of every corner of the world as people attempt to regain and rebuild their narrower ancestral cultures after the fall of the USSR.

2.14.4. Corollary4 - To the extent that we in the U.S. are not successful in the ongoing synthesis of a new widely-embraced ‘vanilla culture’, we will continue to see the echo of cultural balkanization through ongoing social eruptions in our highly

diverse and dense population centers. Such a ‘feast’ is, of course, also movable from Los Angeles County to smaller communities such as Nevada County.

2.15. ‘Preserving’ Nevada County

Our community is still an idyllic pearl of the Sierras in which we see the perennial battle shaping up between entrenched businesses and large landowners, and the small plot residents who are here to consume the beauty, seclusion, and lifestyle that these environs still offer. The battle is already replete with the familiar slogans from both sides that pass for reasoned thought. With the positions and tactics that each side is taking, the outcome of this course is clear. The winners will be those who will NOT be living here to celebrate their victory. After the dust settles, Grass Valley/Nevada City will have turned into another Roseville because the most vocal ‘preservers’ brought no new workable ideas to the ‘community development’ process. For good or ill, those who decide to live here a long time and preserve their current QoL can only speak what they feel, continue to work for clear and selfish goals, and thereby hope to achieve a blessedly different future for themselves and their successors in these foothills. Unfortunately there is not much basis for such hope.

2.15.1. Adopting a Common Statement of Purpose

Community planning without the preamble of an overarching common statement of purpose is difficult, and the difficulty in eliciting such a statement should inform all concerned of the chances of winding up with a satisfactory plan. An example of such a statement of purpose might be -

“Within the larger context of outside population, political, and commercial pressures, promote a local social order that evolves GVNC and Nevada County so as to maintain our current QoL without, in the process, legislating and regulating away our personal liberties, life styles, and property rights.”

Adopting any such statement requires a balance of attitudes that can only be achieved when informed voters act on the basis of their clearly stated social objectives as opposed to responding to sloganeering that subsumes hidden social agendas from the political extremes.

3. Systems Principles and Thinking applied to the Real World

The following paragraphs attempt a short but vital overview of points drawn from systems engineering.

3.1. Systems thinking

all starts when you see something of interest happen that you would like to understand how/why it happened and when, or under what future conditions, it might happen again.

In the 21st century we know that this fundamental curiosity or need is met by an analytical thought process or systems thinking based on tools derived from the systems sciences.

3.2. System Defined

A system is a human abstract of a piece of the universe that we arbitrarily select, bound, and label in order to better understand, communicate with, and/or control the world around us. In this sense a system also represents one possible useful viewpoint of some set of inter-related 'things' that can include people, objects, energy, information, and/or ideas. A system is something that accepts certain inputs and creates outputs that may depend not only on its inner workings, but also the effects of the world surrounding it and the condition it was in when it received the input.

3.3. A taxonomy⁵ is not a system.

The simple listing of 'things' and relating them to each other in, say, an hierarchical tree structure is not a system. Why? - "... systems theory is the study of the interactions and behavior of such an assemblage of 'things' when subjected to certain conditions or inputs. The abstract nature of systems theory is due to the fact that it is concerned with mathematical properties rather than the physical form of the constituent parts." [3] This powerful notion says that once we describe a part of the real world by certain mathematical relations - the abstracted model - we can then deal with the model instead of the real world to understand and predict how the real world will behave. Think about it! How does it come to be that manipulating mere symbols has the power to predict and direct the 'stuff' making up the real world?!

3.4. The 'condition' in which we find a system

is called its STATE. The system state is the minimum number of defined variables the values of which at a given time will summarize all we need to know about the system's past in order to understand its present condition and predict its future behavior. Again, these parameters or 'state variables' are for us to define and should reflect how we want to understand and/or control the system. As an example consider the playground swing as a parent. With your child on the seat, the state of the system for you would most certainly include the position and velocity of the swing, along with its components – frame, chains, seat, safety harness. For the park maintenance staff the swing would be a system with possibly the same components but its state variables would be the age of the paint, the age/condition of the chains and linkages, and, perhaps, the average yearly cost for some minimal level of maintenance.

3.5. Any system - economic, political, mechanical, ... - may be managed

(i.e. controlled in the attempt to maximize or minimize a performance criterion) only to the extent that the manager can comprehend, observe, and control the system. Corollary - control without comprehension leads to breakdown (e.g. revolution from within or destruction from without for social systems; more simply, consider the introduction of a chimpanzee into an empty cockpit of a 747 cruising at 30,000 ft.).

⁵ A taxonomy is an ordered structure of inter-related things usually expressed in hierarchical form such a tree graph with a root that has branches that have branches, etc.

3.6. Not all identified or identifiable large scale real world systems

can be managed by a finite sentient controller - perhaps only a very few can. (This doesn't stop the ignorant from trying – the chimpanzee will manipulate the control yoke of the 747 because he can.)

- Corollary - attempt to control only smaller systems that you can understand.
- Corollary - build large systems as collections of distributed (semi) autonomous smaller systems and let them work in ways mysterious to solve the large problems. (Neural nets, genetic algorithms, artificial life, ..., REAL LIFE)

3.7. The successful management of any system

(e.g. national economy, church organization, school district, computer network, central home heating, airplane, playground swing, fire prevention program, ...) depends on knowledge and agreement on several independent factors the failure of any of which can (and usually does) make the system unmanageable and unpredictable. The factors are:

- 3.7.1. **System definition** - common definitions of system boundary (components making up a system) and state, observation, control, and environmental (uncontrollable exogenous) variables.
- 3.7.2. **Performance Criterion or Utility Function** - a quantifiable measure, dependent on system state variables and control effort, which defines 'good' and 'bad' system performance as accepted by the participants in the enterprise.
- 3.7.3. **System Identification** which prescribes the time dependent relationship of system state, control, and environmental variables. This is the so-called 'system transfer function' (i.e. describes how system state transfers from one set of values to another in response to inputs and the passage of time).
- 3.7.4. **System Observability** in that enough of system state is available to the controller (e.g. manager, bureaucrat, ...) so that any control policy (or law, regulation) that extremizes (maximizes or minimizes) the criterion can be implemented.
- 3.7.5. **Computability** of the transfer function so that useful predictions of future states or understanding of past behaviors can be obtained from 'what if' control and environmental inputs. (Unfortunately the complexity and chaotic behavior mitigates against computability of most real world systems.)
- 3.7.6. **Discover the control/management policy that optimizes** or extremizes the mutually adopted criterion from a time/space (i.e. practical) point of view. And if optimizing is not possible, then at least find a 'satisficing solution' that results from an implementable control (management) policy.

- 3.7.7. **Timeliness** so that all of the above factors can be implemented before the system state migrates so as to sufficiently date (i.e. make useless or obsolete) the most recent observables and/or contemplated control policy.

3.8. Most of nature is chaotic

thereby making all but the near future inaccessible to us in the sense of accurate (i.e. useful) predictability. CHAOTIC - possibly deterministic, possibly driven by a simple underlying process, perhaps even a simple algorithm, but in the end unpredictable through any understood method such as analytical extension or extended simulation. This brings in the critical aspect of randomness in human affairs which should be understood and factored into all of our grand designs on the future. A dose of Taleb [5] is strongly recommended.

3.9. Nature abhors large centrally controlled and/or tightly linked systems

(self-criticality) and instead creates its manifold variety and achieves stability through independent yet interrelated (e.g. symbiotic and modular) systems based on distributed control schemes which act on local knowledge. Corollary - the desire to build and operate large, centrally controlled systems is intrinsically unnatural and the product of ignorant and/or desperate minds seeking to impose small-scale simplicity onto complex large-scale problems.

3.10. As everything in nature, society is a collection of systems.

That is, we can only understand the workings of society to the extent that we can abstract a model for it as a particular system depending on the aspect of society we are studying. The workings of large scale social systems are in the domain of the unknown and implementing large scale control schemes on such systems historically has led to results ranging from wholesale misery to large scale catastrophe.

3.11. An economy is a system

in the same sense that a society is. That is why economics is the marginally effective “dismal science”.

3.12. A small community is also a system

the management of which should be based on known systems principles and processes to the extent that their citizens have the will to understand and implement them.

4. Elements of Community Planning

In this section we summarize the minimal procedural necessities for a reasonable planning process. We argue that implementing the outlined steps will maximize the likelihood that a reasonable plan emerges from the process that has the broadest support of the involved constituencies for whom the plan is intended. For completeness we include a general overview of the commonly implemented planning process that is broadly used to generate plans for everything ranging from community development (general plan), through workforce/affordable housing, to fire safety.

4.1. Community Planning - A Preferred Approach

We maintain that implementing as many of the following steps as possible will enhance the likelihood that the resulting plan will avoid many of the pitfalls that cancel the benefits of such plans. The more of these steps a community can include in its planning process the more subsequent problems it can avoid that weaken the implementation of its plans. These nostrums have survived a variety of institutional planned communities ranging from corporations, non-profits, and even the enlightened arm of government encountered here and there.

- 4.1.1. **Requirements specification** – before one can start any task there must exist some prior knowledge of what the completed task is required to accomplish. The requirements specification is the written statement of this which becomes the seminal document used to arbitrate all subsequent work decisions. It is from this that it contributes value to all stages of planning. Changing the requirements usually changes the entire task and causes the most rework therefore it should be fashioned with care.
- 4.1.2. **Problem Statement** – what problem is plan implementation supposed to resolve? This is often incorporated in the requirements specification.
- 4.1.3. **Gather Community Preferences and Concerns** – through forums and surveys generate a list of ranked preferences and concerns. This may require political interpretation and always requires political support/corroboration.
- 4.1.4. **Inventory Available Assets** – a community often has much unknown and unused expertise along with energetic volunteers in addition to many available data and information repositories both local and web based. Start a list (spreadsheet or database format), add to it, and match with the demands of the plans functional specification (see below).
- 4.1.5. **Identify your customer** - usually this is the government body (elected officials) to whom planning progress will be reported and to whom the plan will be presented for final adoption.
- 4.1.6. **Define an Operational Utility or Criterion Function** – a properly formulated utility allows the objective rating of alternative or competing solutions. Such a utility function captures the subjective values of the planner and/or the community with regard to the planned solution. The utility function includes such, often conflicting, attributes as cost, schedule, content, ... and nominates proxies for these attributes as required to compute the utility. Use this utility to adjudicate between closely competing alternatives.

- 4.1.7. **Functional specification** – define the components of a plan (what items are to be planned for, constraints, costs, contingencies, ...) that can be embodied into a working outline for the final plan.
- 4.1.8. **Itemize levels of expertise required** to write (by plan section) and where they reside – local agencies, consultants, NGOs, expert citizens, volunteers.
- 4.1.9. **Consultants** – often required because of their domain expertise; be sure you know their relevant ideology and who they really work for before hiring them. Check the track record of their work products against the objectives of their past clients.
- 4.1.10. **List external constraints** to be satisfied by the plan and the likelihood of their mitigating critical plan elements.
- 4.1.11. **Gather Data and generate Information** – The utility function and outline determine what data/information is required to establish the acknowledged ‘truth value’ of the plans assumptions and propositions.
- 4.1.12. **Nominate the Planning Committee**, adopt rules (leave a paper trail), and select the Chair. It is important to distinguish between persons with planning & management skills and subject matter or domain experts. A big mistake is putting someone with domain expertise/experience in one of the several areas covered in charge rather than use the person as a resource for that area.
- 4.1.13. **Define Work/Study Groups** and assign to Plan sections – this is driven by the experience/expertise needed to gather/interpret input and write sections.
- 4.1.14. **Generate writing schedule** with input products identified. Generate a PERT chart of what tasks must feed into other tasks while maximizing parallel effort.
- 4.1.15. **Adopt plan development schedule** and specify intermediate review/working drafts and their review/acceptance steps. The planning committee must meet at known progress points with the worker bees to assure that direction and schedule are maintained.
- 4.1.16. **Political liaison** – almost all community plans need one or more (usually elected) political champions. The champion must be kept apprised of all significant developments (new data, hard points encountered, early conclusions, ...). Never surprise your champion with stuff they should have known and defused in a timely manner. If no political champion emerges at the start, one must be ‘manufactured’ if the plan is to have a chance of survival. The champion

works both ways by also providing ongoing motivation to the planning staff usually comprised of a large number of volunteers.

4.1.17. Plan your work; work your plan.

4.2. Community Planning - As It Often Happens

Almost all community planning today is undertaken by amateurs, dominated by politics, and implemented as expediency demands. The prime role of the plan is to serve as political cover for what happens afterward. Almost all plans emerge so flawed that not much is required to sidestep them when some later ad hoc need arises.

Any combination of following steps will assure that the above describes the outcome. In these we let the seasoned reader decide how firmly our tongue need be embedded in our cheek.

- 4.2.1. Do not examine the sufficiency of existing plans and established protocols before announcing that a new plan needs to be written. Remember, all that was then and this is now.
- 4.2.2. Never develop or state the requirements (de facto and de jure) for the new plan. Avoid explicitly stating the problem that the plan is to address so as not restrict its focus or latitude which may be conveniently determined at a more propitious time later.
- 4.2.3. Avoid a paper trail on all deliberations and only leave a very sparse one when one is required. Do not establish a website on which current progress on any of the plan issues will be posted. Broad statements of the problem, subsequent community benefits, and citation of various participating individuals and groups should divert all but the careful web surfer.
- 4.2.4. Always state the objective in the most broad and self-evident terms; if possible make the high level purpose come dressed as a lower level tautology – e.g. “Everyone knows if we lower the fuel levels around houses, we’ll all be safer from wildfire.” - and use that to bolster the most detailed prescriptions contained in the plan and to bash any need for a more precise determination of benefits.
- 4.2.5. Do not choose a leader with demonstrated ability to deal with the overall scope of the problem addressed in the plan. Instead, seek out someone who is experienced in one particular lower echelon implementation skill – e.g. “Harry, our warehouse supervisor, has driven forklifts for over thirty years, let’s have him head up the planning effort for the next warehouse inventory control system.”,

or “Jim has over 5,000 hours in the cockpit, we’ll put him in charge planning for the next passenger liner.”

- 4.2.6. Stay away from any objective definition of what a good plan or system would look like so that subsequent decisions in the planning process need never be burdened by spurious application of reason or quantitative metrics.
- 4.2.7. Schedule ‘community input’ early and often throughout the planning process. This will serve as the palliative for the usual criticisms that city hall never listens while the insiders are always provide the final interpretations of such varied and vague inputs.
- 4.2.8. Hold all community input sessions in the broadest possible forums conducted under the broadest possible agendas. Do not focus a session on any critical aspect or attribute of the plan because the good people attending might just stay on the subject and express themselves with unexpected clarity that may give rise to some awkward community consensus.⁶
- 4.2.9. In public testimony, always give equal weight and credence to learned recommendations supported by broad based statistics and those inevitable warm human anecdotes that dominate the microphone and never quite focus on the intent of the gathering. (Again see above.)
- 4.2.10. Quietly form workgroups of as many people with opposing political views as possible with preferably no experience in planning or the area under consideration. Pick loud and energetic activists from all sides of the political spectrum.
- 4.2.11. Do not identify what planning and subject matter expertise talents are needed and issue a call for such people from the community because they may just show up and lead to an embarrassing loss of control over the whole process.
- 4.2.12. The components of a plan can be usefully expressed in a detailed outline that also specifies the scope of the work that follows. Such an outline will reveal what certain areas and factors will be considered and to what depth. If possible avoid early development and dissemination of such an outline.
- 4.2.13. Do not lay out the tasks or schedule the work of researching and writing the plan. Planning that falls behind is easy to control and

⁶ Actually there is little chance of that because the Department of Education has again verified that the ability of the American adult to identify, let alone evaluate, editorial positions is limited. Discerning readers should peruse [4] only in the company of strong drink.

catch-up is not a problem since the final scope of the plan is seldom foreordained (see above).

- 4.2.14. Involve many people in overlapping areas of responsibility with no clear lines of authority. This insures a surfeit of excuses for any transgression that someone may later bring up. Remember, no one is accountable in the enterprise of community planning.
- 4.2.15. Consultants should only be hired to bolster previously accepted conclusions. Here it is necessary to come up with the answer ('we need at least a \$100,000 mitigation fee for every intersection') before the consultant starts work.
- 4.2.16. Invert the planning staff structure – sprinkle (especially uniformed) domain experts high in the hierarchy and people with systems and planning expertise near the bottom. This arrangement is much easier to control politically.
- 4.2.17. Analytics in planning bring in formulas, require explicit data, and call for some numeracy skills not only to apply but to understand the results. No matter the putative benefits, this puts unneeded stress on all parts of the planning process and should be avoided.
- 4.2.18. Most real world problems have solutions which are compromises the effects of which are interrelated. Keep the various areas the plan addresses as distinct and independent as possible while revealing no awkward connections to other areas. This is also much easier to do in the absence of analytics and allows for simplistic single-issue arguments. Divide and conquer.
- 4.2.19. Always publish the plan with the appearance of its having recently descended from Mt. Sinai. No need to be timid with such headers as 'Working Draft' that invite extended deliberation and embarrassing discovery. Make it look as it were already a political *fait accompli* and ready for its place on government bookshelves. This gives its supportive constituency numerous opportunities to garner publicity and make unfounded claims that subsequently can easily become founded.

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